

5 December 1986 90p weekly

including  
VOLUNTARY  
ACTION

# NEW SOCIETY

**BLIND FAITH: THE BRITISH BORN-AGAIN MOVEMENT**



**Do workers want high-tec? Warnock on abortion.  
The battered social worker. Gas: is Sid bonkers?**

# NEW SOCIETY

5 December 1986  
vol 78 No. 1249



COVER: Revivalist churches.  
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John Reardon.

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**Lindsey Williams on the role of the police in dealing with domestic violence.**

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The General Election Campaign of 1983' edited by Ivor Crewe and Martin Harrop

**Robert Reiner**

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**Bhikhu Parekh**

'The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi' edited by Raghavan Iyer

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American teenager Jeanette (left) at 15, carrying Victor's child, Victor, aged 14, also got Jeanette's sister pregnant.

that, faced with the choice of abortion, they should take their decision seriously. She realises that nothing will make abortion go away: it cannot be abolished. But she herself could never think it right. She fully recognises that her judgment is based on sentiment, not reason. She does not defend the feeling, but only states that it is strong, and that she will not be moved from it by any argument.

Mary Kenny's book, though in some ways informative and full of moral conviction, is not scholarly or deeply analytic. The same might be said of Colin Francome's *Abortion Practice*. But there is more of real interest in it, since it is concerned, not with anecdotal findings, nor with the author's own attitudes, but with a comparison between the prevalence of abortion in Britain and the United States, and an attempt to discover ways in which, in both countries, abortions could become less frequent. A moral position is thus revealed. It is assumed that it would be better if there were fewer abortions, and it is probably true that most people would make the same assumption.

Francome's statistics show that the average rate of abortion in the United States is more than twice that in Britain (though the abortions are usually carried out at an earlier stage of pregnancy). He is mainly concerned with teenage abortions, and in order to explain the higher American rate here, he has some illuminating observations on the behaviour of teenage groups in both countries. These are based on what the sociologists call "participant observation." Francome's younger brother was a member of an apparently characteristic group in Swindon; and he himself went to teach in the United States for a year, and could thus find out about his pupils' goings-on. His work, therefore, has an immediacy and credibility often lacking in the work of academic sociologists.

Briefly, he finds that American teenage boys are much more likely to be sexually active than their British counterparts because of a commitment to proving their maleness by forming sexual relationships. The whole culture of "dating" is based on this need. In Britain, though there is much sexual boasting among young males, on the whole their social life is based on the male peer-group or gang until they are much older. Even attendance at dances or discos is dominated by the peer group. Although boys meet girls at these ceremonies, it is quite rare for any real relationship to be established between the sexes.

This means that when sexual intercourse does occur, whatever the girl may feel about it, it is very likely that for the boy it will be relatively unromantic and experimental. This makes it unlikely that contraceptive precautions will be taken. It is still difficult for a girl to take precautions when she does not know whether, or when, she will be required for sexual purposes. The American style would make it more plausible for contraception to be used, if only it were more readily and cheaply available in the United States.

Francome's solution to the problem of teenage pregnancies and abortion (though he

## BOOKS

# To have or not to have

### ABORTION: THE WHOLE STORY

Mary Kenny

Quartet £9.95

### ABORTION PRACTICE IN BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

Colin Francome

Allen & Unwin £7.95 paperback/£18 hardback

### ABORTION AND WOMAN'S CHOICE

Rosalind Polack Petchesky

Verso £8.95 paperback/£24.95 hardback

### MARY WARNOCK

Mary Kenny is an experienced journalist, with an accomplished interview technique. She records, in this book, a number of interviews, both with those who have had abortions, and with theorists. She does not perhaps cover, as the blurb-writer claims, "every imaginable issue surrounding... the subject of abortion"; it is not absolutely the whole story. But it is a good read, and oddly soothing. She wanders amiably round the

subject, what it's like to have an abortion; whether women choosing abortion are asked if they would consider having the baby and letting it be adopted (they mostly are not asked this); why people decide to have abortions; what various theorists think about it, and so on.

She is not at all unsympathetic, and, on the whole, seems content that women should make their own choices. All she demands is

admits that it will reduce, not eliminate, abortions) is simple and convincing: more sex-education, and better birth control facilities. The aim is to induce through education a greater sense of responsibility, not by preaching chastity, which may well be counter-productive, but by early and prolonged discussion, and a far greater encouragement of men and boys to attend birth control clinics. Education could, and can, make a huge difference to the attitudes of both boys and girls to pre-marital sex. Francome's book ought to help to convince Members of Parliament that sex education is not a harmful and disruptive threat to The Family.

Rosalind Petchesky's book was published two years ago in the United States. Its importance for British readers undoubtedly lies in the perceptive and daunting analysis it presents of the New Right, the pro-family politicians. The book is long and pretentious. The reader must struggle with a good deal of feminist-style jargon. There is also a strong identification of feminism with the radical left, the more understandable in the United States since state-funded contraception and abortion are regarded as goals only for dangerous socialists. They're also goals for feminists. But even those who are neither fully paid-up feminists nor politically far left should be alarmed by the Return to Victorian Values, or Family ideology.

Petchesky shows how the generally liberalised law regarding abortion has been accommodated by the hard "moral" right. Abortion is permitted, but only in a shame-ridden and infantilising way. She quotes a story called "Daddy, I'm sorry" published in *Families* magazine, where a pregnant teenager throws herself on the mercy of her stern father, is rushed out of town to have her abortion but is nonetheless morally "rescued" by her penitence within the bosom of the family. She returns, the innocent and good little girl, the fallen, but forgiven, Angel in the House. The relevance of such a presentation of Family power to the issues of the Gillick case is obvious.

But the main message of this book is unlikely to be widely accepted. The argument is that women will never get what they need as long as abortion is regarded as an evil; and choice of abortion as a choice between evils. (This, after all, is the meaning of Mary Kenny's demand that women should see their choice as "serious.") Rosalind Petchesky holds that we shall not be truly free until we stop thinking about individual women facing moral dilemmas, and think instead of women as a group, and the availability to the group of free and non-guilt-ridden abortion.

The trouble is that not even the most ardent feminist can change the fact that women get pregnant one by one, and that an unwanted or intolerable pregnancy is something a woman has to face for herself, and, ultimately, on her own. That she should be helped; that she should not, as she often is, be made to feel guilty, does not entail that she has no decision to make. Neither attempting, in the words of President Reagan, to "stamp out abortion" by law, nor making it a straightforward service-provision, can alter the nature of these facts.

## Case notes

RECENT DEBATE

Allen Thomas Ellis and Tom Pitt-Aikens

(Duckworth 11/2/86)

COLIN WARD

When Geoffrey was six he was sent to the child guidance clinic because of his piling. When he was nine he was sent to another one because of that and his habitual bedwetting. At 13 "very disruptive in and out of school," he was before the juvenile court for stealing. At 14, after several charges of burglary and theft, truancy and violent aggression towards his family, he found himself at a community home.

During his two years there he added to his compendium of sins acts of "indecent exposure" and the theft of female clothing. The pattern continued until he was sent to borstal for a year, charged with arson, having attempted to blow up an immersion heater in the loft of a church. The consultant psychiatrist at both the community home and the borstal was Tom Pitt-Aikens. He believes that the "delinquent" is "to a greater or lesser degree a personification of issues which are unconscious and require to be made conscious in his family. Unless this happens, dangerous situations will ensue in the family: what are known as 'catastrophes on the time horizon'."

The method he has evolved to make the issues conscious is a series of highly-structured Family Meetings. In this case they were

attended by the professionals (including an ever-changing series of social workers and probation officers); by Geoffrey's parents, an "ordinary" middle class couple, sometimes by his brothers and sisters, who seldom came finding the procedure boring and nutty, and by Geoffrey himself, when he chose to come.

The records of these meetings are presented here by the novelist Alice Thomas Ellis, who attended the last few of them and became very fond of the long suffering parents. She remarks that if she had set out to write a novel about a delinquent child she would not have given him this family background, and that if she had chosen to write about that couple she could not have given them a delinquent child. When the first meeting was held in 1976, Geoffrey was 15. By the thirty-sixth in 1983, he was a young man living an ordinary life, out of trouble.

And yes! The endless discussion at the meetings *did* reveal from the family's history extraordinary premonitions of Geoffrey and his troubles. So much so that we read on with anxiety, in case he should kill himself at 17 like an uncle who blew himself up in the attic, or in case his father should die at 50 like *his* father.

But did the long process of exploring the catastrophes on the time horizon do anything to extract Geoffrey from his career as a social nuisance? The authors offer no opinion, but it is evident to the reader that the meetings did a great deal for the harassed parents who loyally turned up for over seven years to take

## STUFFING FOR RED STOCKINGS

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Despatches from the Spanish Civil War

James Pettifer (ed)

'The reader prepared to relive the heady days of the summer of 1936 will find no better brew than that concocted by Cockburn' — Paul Preston in *New Society* £4.95 paperback

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Alan Winnington

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John Foster and Charles Woolfson

'An extraordinary work, highly recommended' — *New Society* £9.95 paperback

### Fire Under the Carpet

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Sylvia Scaffardi

'It's all there' — Molly Parkin in *Time Out* £4.95 paperback

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Robert Tressell

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